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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to ascertain whether a basic skills development program, an individualized, programmed laboratory experience in which students contracted to work toward a self-defined resolution of their skill deficiencies, would result in a measurable change in the self concept of high-risk students enrolled in the program at Essex Community College (Maryland). The Tennessee Self Concept Scale was administered to the 11 students enrolled in the class at the outset and the conclusion of the semester. Actual growth in self concept was calculated by subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test score with the extent of the student's self concept change rated as a percent of the actual growth score in relation to potential growth. Analysis of the data revealed the percent of growth in self concept of the study subjects ranged from -1 to 57. Student grade point averages (GPA) were also used in the evaluation: five students showed a decline in GPA compared to the previous semester, three an increase, and for the remaining three there were no comparable data. It was concluded that growth in self concept was achieved but was not always directly reflected in student GPA. When other variables such as course loads and persistence are considered, a growth relationship can be seen. (JDS)

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SELF CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGH RISK STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Ken Bourn

Alexander Dumas stated, "A person who doubts himself is like a man who would enlist in the ranks of his enemies and bear arms against himself. He makes his failure certain by himself being the first person to be convinced of it." There is an overwhelming body of contemporary research pointing insistently to the significant relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement which suggests strongly that the self concept of the student can no longer be ignored by instructors. It is a personal tragedy and social waste when a student spends day after day experiencing defeat and failure. The cause of the failure and the effects of the failing experience are complex, but a continuous and central factor in both cause and effect is the way in which a student views himself and his abilities.

Achievers and underachievers each have specific measurable characteristics. J. C. Gowan, reporting in his 1960 study "Factors of Achievement in High School and College", stated that achievers are characterized by self confidence, self acceptance, and a positive self concept. Most investigators agree that the underachieving student sees himself as less capable, less worthy, and less adequate than his more successful peers. Conclusions of studies indicate that self concepts stand in a causal relationship to academic achievement. Once we have acquired an idea about ourselves, it serves to edit all incoming information and to influence our future performance. One such study giving evidence that this situation is true at each grade level is "Self-concept of Ability and School Achievement" reported by W. B. Brookover in 1965. M. B. Fink's 1962 study, "Self-concept as it Relates to Academic Achievement", indicated that this relationship appears stronger in boys than in girls. However, at all grade levels, and for both sexes, there is a significant relationship between achievement and self

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concept. In the face of this evidence, it is incumbent upon the educational institution to make special arrangements for the high risk student facing repeated failure or rejecting the improved opportunities offered by higher education. Correspondingly, dropouts have significantly lower self concepts of their academic abilities. Traditionally, community colleges have been charged with the developmental education in institutions of higher learning. Because of this, it has been the community college to which the mature nonachiever has turned for support and direction. In response to this obligation, community colleges, and some "open admission" four-year colleges, have established courses in basic skills development. The clientele of the basic skills courses are these mature nonachievers in the academic world. Many of these students have low self concepts. Low starting levels and slow progress, coupled with a history of failure to attain academic success may be disasterous to the self-actualization of students. Instructors dealing with this situation must be aware of the student's need for self concept development.

Self concept has been defined by A. W. Combs as, "What an individual believes he is". Self concept deals with the subjective and personal evaluation of the student by the student. This area has been virtually ignored by psychologists and largely overlooked by educators. Basic skills course instructors must reverse this situation and deal directly with self concept development resulting in positive academic attitudes capable of transferring basic skills into successful academic experiences. W. B. Brookover and E. L. Erickson reported in their 1967 study, "Self-concept of Ability and School Achievement", that their six-year latitudinal study supported the hypothesis that self concept of academic ability is significantly related to achievement. This relationship persists even when the intelligence element is factored out; achievement in school is limited by the student's concept of his ability, and the <u>self concept of ability</u> is a better predictor of success in school than is <u>over-all self concept</u>. Confidence in

one's academic ability is a necessary, but not sufficient factor in determining scholastic success. Supporting this position, F. S. Irwin reported in his 1967 study, "Sentence Completion Responses and Scholastic Success or Failure," that it may well be that a positive conception of one's self as a person is not any less important than striving to get ahead, enthusiasm for studying, and going to school, but that it is a central factor when considering optimal scholastic performance. M. W. Lamy suggested that perceptions about oneself and the world are not only related to, but may in fact be causal factors in subsequent reading achievement. In their 1966 study, "Personality Characteristics of Ineffective, Effective and Efficient Readers," R. J. Brunkan and F. Sheni indicated that the efficient and effective readers characterized themselves in favorable ways, which was not true of the ineffective readers. Significant positive correlations between self concepts and reading and mathematics achievement were found by R. L. Williams and S. Cole in their 1968 study, "Self-concept and School Adjustment". I. L. Zimmerman and G. N. Allebrand reported in their 1965 study, "Personality Characteristics and Attitudes Toward Achievement of Good and Poor Readers", that poor readers lack sufficient sense of personal worth, freedom, stability and adequacy - to the extent that they avoided achievement.

THE HYPOTHESIS

An effective basic skills development program will result in a measurable change in the student's self concept.

THE SAMPLE

Eleven students enrolled in a basic skills development class were used for this study. The students selected the class because of their academic needs and their personal obligations outside of the college. There was no effort to select the students nor to match them with a control group. This study was self-contained, dealing with self concept growth and academic stimulation.

THE PROCEDURE

The TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE was selected as the objective scale for measuring the change in the student's self concept. This scale acknowledges Abraham Maslow's contention that a positive level of self-esteem is the final prerequisite for self-actualization. Therefore, it is self concept which serves as an index or criterion of self-actualization. The greatest resource in the rehabilitation of any individual is the individual himself. This rehabilitation is a process of helping the individual to utilize and actualize his own potentialities. This scale has a wide variety of studies related to it.

Disadvantages of the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE are that it tries to measure a subjective intangible and that it is a verbal paper-and-pencil situation.

As a part of this initial interview the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE by Dr. William H. Fitts was administered to each student. The basic skills development program at Essex Community College in Baltimore County, Maryland, is identified as Learning Skills - Reading 021. It is a three hour, non-credit, individualized, programmed, laboratory experience. During personal interviews each student contracted to work toward a <u>self defined</u> resolution of his skill deficiencies as he perceived them.

A copy of this LEARNING SKILLS CONTRACT follows:

LEARNING SKILLS CONTRACT

1 Student:

Date:

Phone:

3 Observable behavior which will indicate that the problem no longer exists:

third level goal:

second level goal:

first level goal:

2 Observable behavior which indicates that there is a problem:

ORAL CONTRACT:

"I agree to be honest even though at times it may be difficult to do so."

"I agree to be responsible for my behavior when we are together and when I am outside of this interview."

Student signature:

Reinforcers:

_____factual report

_____change in feeling and attitude

_____matural rewards

_____verbal support by the instructor

Follow up:

_____modify the contract

_____set a new contract

_____discontinue the program

The student first affixes his name, the date and his phone number to the upper right hand corner of the Learning Skills Contract. Secondly the student writes a description of the observable behavior which indictes to him that there

is a problem in the space provided. A Reading Specialist can glean a great deal of information from the way a student expresses his feelings about his weaknesses. After describing his problem, the student then moves his attention up the paper to the area numbered three. At this point, the student identifies the observable behavior which will indicate to him that the problem on longer exists. Once again, the Reading Specialist has insight into the student's situation as he sees it and as it exists in relation to the world of reality. With the student, the instructor reads the Oral Contract; discussion may follow and the student signs the contract.

In conference with the student, the instructor evaluates the student's problem and his goal. Easily achievable "middle" goals are assigned to the student by the instructor. These assignments are written into the contract as the first, second and third level goals. Working up the paper, from the problem to the solution, has a positive psychological effect.

Reinforcers are discussed between the instructor and the student. More than one reinforcer may be used in a contract. If the decision is to use factual reports as a reinforcer, testing with standardized tests is in order. The instructor should help direct the student to the reinforcers which would be most rewarding to the student. Some students do not do well in testing situations. Counseling relative to the student's change in feeling and attitude may be a rewarding reinforcer. Warmth and understanding can be very helpful to a student with a low self concept. Material rewards are common forms of behavior modification; they may also be very dangerous traps for both the student and the instructor. The instructor needs to stay aware of his limitations as well as those of the student and the need for the student to become independent. Verbal support from the instructor may be all the student needs to overcome a history of hostile educational situations. As many honest reinforcers should be used as possible.

Evaluation of the student's contracts was made (1) upon request of the student, (2) as established goals were reached, or (3) on a weekly basis. The conclusion of the evaluation resulted in the establishment of a revised contract or reaffirmation of the existing contract. Personal circumstances, areas of interest, and levels of success were justification for adjustment in the level, speed, scope or even the subject of the student's efforts. This adjustment is recorded in the follow up area of the contract form. In this way, each contract is terminated before a new contract is undertaken. A student would be working on only one contract at a time. However, the student may terminate a contract at any point in the contract and set forth on a new contract.

Acceptance of the student's evaluation of himself as the focal point for contracting throws the onerous of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the student. Many students have never before been the masters of their areas of learning. The instructor counsels the student as to the possible consequences of his choices; however, the contract is one between equal partners in the educational process.

The instructional method and materials used in this program are not unique. In this study, most of the materials were student course related texts or trade manuals having a high probability of immediate reward and removing the need for transfer learning. The instruction was casual tutoring to an immediate need, or programmed review of tutored skills for the purpose of mastery. The subject of the text or manual was not tutored - the use of the text was tutored. Vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, writing and speed skills were at the base of most tutoring.

Mid-semester course evaluations were rendered by the students and adjustments were made. At the end of the semester the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE was ad-

ministered again, and an open ended subjective success questionnaire was completed by each student.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation of the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE results were as follows:

(1) The pretest totals for each of the fifteen subtests were determined by adding the results of each of the six items identified within each subtest.

(2) Calculation of the potential growth was accomplished by subtracting the pretest total from 450. (Each item is rated from one to five. There are six items in each of the fifteen subtests.)

(3) The post test totals were determined in the same manner as the pretest totals after the sixteen week instructional period.

(4) Actual growth for each student was ascertained by subtracting the pretest score from the post test score.

(5) Extent of the student's self concept change is rated as a percent of the actual growth score in relation to the potential growth.

RESULTS

The percent of growth for the eleven students in the study ranged from -1 to 57, a total range of 58 units. Below is a chart indicating the specific figures.

Student	Pretest	Potential Growth	Post test	Actual Growth	Percent Change
1	303	147	334	31	21
2	387	63	408	21	33
3	341	109	353	12	11
4	400	50	415	15	30
5	349	101	347	-2	-1
6	358	92	367	9	9
7	327	123	398	71	57
8	354	96	385	31	32
9	354	96	359	5	5
10	375	75	390	15	20
11	287	163	296	9	5

Reports of the open end subjective success questionnaires were all postitive. Each showed a growth in the student's self concept as seen by the student. The change in students' quality point average were also used as elements in the evaluation. Five students showed a negative growth in quality point average; however, the total positive growth shown by three students was greater than the total negative growth shown by the five students. Three students were in their first semester of college and no evaluation could be made for them.

Findings in each of these areas have their greatest meaning when they are placed in relation to each other. These findings follow.

The percent change for student number one was 21 percent in a positive direction. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "Yes, I think I am more successful because I have learned many new words from my reading that I did not know about and therefore gave me a better understanding of the story I read. No, I don't know if this will help me with my other subjects, but I hope so. If so, maybe I need more practice and that is what I am going to do this summer." A maintenance of the quality point average from the previous semester was recorded.

The percent change for student number two was a positive 33 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I have not only improved my ability to spell but I have found a new source of self confidence." No comparison of quality point average could be made for this student because this was his first semester in college.

The percent change for student number three was a positive 11 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I think that it has helped me a lot." A negative .37 change was recorded in the student's quality point average from the previous semester. However, in reviewing this record it is clear that the previous semester this student carried two academic courses and two mini-courses. He dropped one academic course and received a "D"

in the other. During the semester of this study, he carried two academic courses and two mini-courses. He received a "C" in one academic course and a "D" in the other. The change in the quality point average was due to the grades in the mini-courses.

The percent change for student number four was a positive 30 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "This class has helped my life to be more meaningful. Through the work I have done in this class I have found life more rewarding." A drop of one full point was recorded in this student's quality point average. However, in reviewing this record one finds that the grade in College Physics II was a "C" while College Physics I had been graded at an "A" level.

The percent change for student number five was one in a negative direction. In the open ended subjective questionnaire the student stated, "I can now read something and still be able to comprehend what I am reading about. I can read much faster and better. I am at the point where I can understand words better. College has made me more alert and in different subjects. One can not say enough good things about the teaching in Learning Skills. I like the methods of the instructor very much and I feel I am much wiser today. Yes, it was a success." No comparison of quality point average could be made for this student because this was his first semester in college.

The percent change for student number six was a positive 9 percent. In the open ended success questionnaire the student stated, "For some strange reason, this course made me more at ease and comfortable. I don't think I really learned a lot but I have found out that I have become more patient also, and this is something I needed to improve on." A negative .65 change was recorded in this student's quality point average from the previous semester. However, in the previous semester the student carried 11 hours of credit while during the study he was carrying 15 hours of credit. The additional course

was a grade of "C" while the second half of Anatomy (a four hour course) was graded as a "C" dropping from a "B" in the first half of the course the previous semester.

The percent change for student number seven was a whopping positive 57 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "Through this program I have found that my grades in school are beginning to pick up. I am more confident in my speaking and writing, and also my vocabulary has picked up. I feel that this course was very beneficial to myself and I would recommend this course to everyone." A drop of one full point was recorded in this student's quality point average from the previous semester. However, in the previous semester the student registered for four courses, dropped three and received a "B" in the only one he finished. During the semester of this study the student carried six courses finishing them all with a "C" average.

The percent change for student number eight was a positive 32 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I think this class was successful for me. I can tell that it has improved my spelling but not as much as I would have liked it to. I think if there was more individual help that was forced not just offered, I also think the post test should be on different words. I found myself memorizing words instead of learning how to spell them. In all, I was happy in what I have done. I would also like to say that I think you were a main reason the class was a success." A positive 1.07 change was recorded in this student's quality point average from the previous semester.

The percent change for the ninth student in this report was a positive 5 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I feel this course I have just completed has been very good for me. I have learned about vowels and consonants. I have learned how to spell words which I have been misspelling for years and now I feel I will never forget how

to spell them. My thanks to a very good instructor who has been a great deal of help to me." A positive .83 change was recorded in the student's quality point average from the previous semester.

The percent change for the tenth student in this study was a positive 20 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "In this program I really can say that I did better in my spelling and also did better in my dictionary habits. I found myself going for the dictionary when I found that I did need it. This program also helped me to do better on papers that I had to write because I knew how to spell. The only thing that I wish would change is the point score for the 150 words. I think maybe a few more points should be given for them because I think it takes a lot of effort to do them. Thanks for the help though, it proved worth my while." A negative .27 change in the student's quality point average was recorded from the previous semester. However, in the previous semester the student carried nine hours which included three hours of mini-courses. During the semester of this study this student carried 12 hours with only one mini-course and dropped from a grade of "C" in Sociology to a "D" grade in Psychology.

The percent change for the eleventh student in this study was a positive 5 percent. In the open ended subjective success questionnaire the student stated, "I liked my spelling class very, very much. It was a lot of work, but it was fun too. I feel I can spell words a little bit better than before, but I also feel I should work on it more." A positive 1.5 change in the student's quality point average was recorded from the previous semester.

CONCLUSION

A measurable positive growth in self concept was achieved with high risk students in a basic skills development program at the community college level, thus supporting the hypothesis. Open ended subjective success questionnaires

reflected a similar growth in both social self concept and the academic self concept of the students. The relation of this growth is not always directly reflected in the student's quality point average; however, when the circumstances of the semesters involved are taken into consideration, a growth relationship can be seen.

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